

Remembering Hillary

Bill Werthmann is biking across Canada in memory of his daughter Hillary, who committed suicide 10 years ago

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On May 8, Bill Werthmann began a journey that will take him across Canada, raising money and awareness about youth depression and suicide.

The former Frederictonian is biking from Victoria, B.C., to St. Johns, N.L., in memory of his daughter Hillary, holding fundraising concerts at different stops along the way.

Ed Werthmann of Fredericton is Hillary's uncle.

"Hillary was my younger brother's daughter. She committed suicide at age 20. That was 10 years ago," he says.



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Gone too soon: Hillary Werthmann was only 20 when she committed suicide 10 years ago. Her father is biking across Canada in her memory to raise awareness about youth depression and suicide.



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Honouring his daughter: Bill Werthmann is riding his bike across Canada in memory of his daughter Hillary, who died 10 years ago at the age of 20. Along the way, he's holding concerts to raise awareness about youth depression and suicide, as well as money for various charities.

"Outwardly, Hillary was just like any other young girl. She was popular in school, a good student, well-loved by everyone around her, but as Bill put it, she struggled within. We'll never know the reasons why somebody commits suicide."

Hillary left behind her dad, mom, stepmom, a brother and stepsisters, as well as her extended family and many friends, he says.

To help him deal with his loss, Bill Werthmann came up with the idea for Hillary's Ride.

"It's been in the back of his head for many years, not so much Hillary's Ride, but the idea of this cross-country tour on bicycle.

"Back when Bill first talked about having this dream, when we were kids, he said wouldn't it be great to go across the country on a bike.

"Then as he got into his adult life, it was going to be a motorcycle. In recent years, he's taken to putting the motorbike aside and picking up a pedal bike, and that's how he gets around Edmon-

ton. I guess he revisited his original dream about using the bicycle," says Ed Werthmann.

"With 10 years since Hillary's death approaching, he thought maybe I can use my dream to tour the country on bicycle to do something in Hillary's memory.

"This is when he came up with the idea for Hillary's Ride. He's been planning this for a couple of years.

"He thought it would be a good way to see the country and talk about Hillary and talk about the broader issues of mental health and teen suicide."

Bill Werthmann is doing the ride with two friends, Terry Fannon and Sue Sohnle. They are accompanied by a vehicle driven by Al Carlson through to Ottawa, where Doug Law will take over his duties.

The group left from mile zero, the beginning of the Trans-Canada Highway in Victoria, B.C., on May 8, the anniversary of Hillary's death.

"They've been at it ever since. They are due to arrive here on July 2," says

Ed Werthmann.

The plan is for Bill Werthmann to take part in a fundraising concert in Fredericton on July 3.

"Bill's very involved in the music industry. He and Bettyjo (his wife) are the principals at the Northern Lights Folk Club in Edmonton. This was his idea, in conjunction with the ride, they would, at various points across the country, try to organize concerts as a way to raise money, both for Hillary's Ride and the charities and non-profits they're supporting in different communities," says Ed Werthmann.

In Fredericton, they're supporting Family Enrichment and Counselling Service with two separate events. The first one is taking place on June 23, before Bill Werthmann arrives. That evening at All Saint's Church in Marysville there will be a concert featuring Where Rivers Meet. The concert runs from 7-9 p.m. and the cost is a freewill offering.

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The second concert on July 3 at Dolan's Pub is one Bill Werthmann will be able to participate in. He'll be performing that night, as will local bands The Three of Us, Jon Fidler & The Suspects and Somerville.

The concert runs from 5-10 p.m. and there is a \$10 cover charge, \$5 for those with a student ID.

"People can order from the regular menu, but they're going to do a special menu as well," says Anne Marie Hartford, the executive director of Family Enrichment and Counselling Service.

"We will do 50/50 tickets and we'll take names and numbers, so you don't have to be there to win."

Hartford was first contacted by Linda Werthmann about Hillary's Ride last fall. Linda Werthmann is Hillary's mother. Having this opportunity means a lot to Family Enrichment.

"It's wonderful. That's the best a charity can hope for, that a group decides to do a fundraiser in support of your charity," says Hartford.

Teaming up with Hillary's Ride on this event provides a platform for the organization to address a serious issue, that of youth depression and suicide. Hartford wants people to know that suicide is preventable.

"What I wish most of all is that the

stigma around accessing counselling would be gone. We all need help at some times in our lives. It's not a shame. It takes courage to say I deserve to be happier, I deserve to have a better life and I might need a hand while I'm going through this rocky period," she says.

That's where counselling comes in. "A lot of people assume counselling is expensive," she says, and it can be because you need a highly trained professional to perform this one-on-one, one-hour service.

"What we offer the community, and what an event like this helps us do, is make counselling available at a subsidized rate."

This kind of event allows them to increase awareness about the organization and the fact that counselling is a healthy thing to do, she says, on top of raising funds to help them continue to provide this service.

"All the money raised from this event will be used to subsidize services to youth," says Hartford. "As long as people can come through the door, we can help them."

She says that youth depression shows itself differently than adult depression.

Typically an adult will become lethargic, withdraw and lose interest in food, sex, friends, making it obvi-

ous to those around them that they are depressed.

"Youth don't always show depression the same way. They don't necessarily withdraw quite as much. You can be around a young person that is pretty depressed and not realize it," she says.

Too often, people wait until they're desperate to seek help. Her advice is to not wait because medication and counselling cannot work miracles. Time is needed for both to start to help.

"One of our goals in this agency that we've been addressing is how do we convince people to seek help before they hit the brick wall because then there is time to address the issues before they're desperate," says Hartford. "It's pretty typical for people to wait until they just can't stand it one more day. It's hard to turn it around quickly then."

People don't need to get a referral from a doctor to go to Family Enrichment, they can self-refer, she says, adding, "Just pick up the phone and give us a call."

For more information about Family Enrichment and Counselling Service, call 458-8211 or visit www.family-enrichment.ca. For more information about Hillary's Ride, visit www.hillarysride.ca.